



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

[Review of] Kris Hiuser, Animals, Theology and the Incarnation

Citation for published version:

Grumett, D 2021, '[Review of] Kris Hiuser, Animals, Theology and the Incarnation', *Modern Believing*, vol. 62, no. 2, pp. 184-5. <https://doi.org/10.3828/mb.2021.12>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.3828/mb.2021.12](https://doi.org/10.3828/mb.2021.12)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Modern Believing

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Kris Hiuser, *Animals, Theology and the Incarnation*. London: SCM Press, 2017. Pp. vi, 290. Pb. £20.99. ISBN 978-0-334-05538-9.

In his published doctoral thesis, Kris Hiuser uses the incarnation to ground a theology hospitable to animals. Given this doctrine is standardly understood as being about God becoming human, it might seem an unpromising starting point. However, by moving through Anselm, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus to Barth, Hiuser shows the doctrine's implications for the wider sentient order.

For Anselm, the incarnation is God's response to human sin, which is the consequence of the human misuse of rational free will. Anselm recognizes that animals have sensory knowledge and can make choices. Nevertheless, he thinks they cannot reason and that they lack free will. Anselm therefore regards animals as incapable of sin and untainted by guilt. According to this reasoning, because punishment is the disciplining of a rational free will, and animals lack such a will, they cannot even be punished. Yet at points in Scripture, animals are clearly presented as sinful and fallenness is portrayed as cosmic.

In view of similar understandings of sin, reason and free will, Gregory of Nyssa's incarnation account initially seems equally anthropocentric. Nevertheless, for him embodiment enables humans to share in the passions, emotions, biological functions and daily rhythms of the irrational animals too. Humans are therefore a unique microcosm of the whole created order, uniting the material and mental with the spiritual.

This vision is developed and systematized by Maximus the Confessor, for whom the microcosmic function calls humans to actively reunify the fallen cosmos by binding together its disparate parts. In so doing, they may pass from possessing the divine image to attaining the divine likeness. Sentient beings may, like all other created entities, be viewed as exhibiting the divine *logoi*, and all are therefore of 'redemptive concern to God' (p. 127). Unlike Gregory, Maximus thus provides the potential foundations for a comprehensive Christian ethical programme including animal welfare.

The study then leaps forward in time to Karl Barth, who recognizes both the uniquely human origin of sin and a wider cosmic fallenness. God enters into a covenant partnership with humans not because of their exalted status but due to their sin. Animals, Barth says, indirectly participate in this covenant as the constant companions and attendants of humans, reflecting human salvation and perdition in their own lives (p. 144; see *Church Dogmatics* III/1, p. 178). Central to Hiuser's reading of Barth is an expansive understanding of the human being as God's representative, standing in for God and acting on God's behalf in the world, as well as communicating God's plan to the world. As part of their representational calling, Hiuser contends, humans should pray for animals.

The final chapter offers some cursory reflections on the implications for animal as pets, as labour and in farming. However, the book's principal achievement is to contribute to clearing space for animals within historical doctrinal theology. Hiuser shows us that, where animals were marginal in medieval and patristic theology, this was because they were deemed sinless rather than unimportant. Animals could be given a more prominent place in theology as sinners, but the arguments against this seem sound. Hiuser's approach of seeing them as fallen in a wider sense and as requiring reconciliation through responsible human action merits further exploration.